

Oral history interview with Mr. Fred Boyles (April 2009)

Martha: This is Martha Wiley on April 2nd 2009, interviewing Fred Boyles. Mr. Boyles, I was wondering if you could start out just telling us where you work now and what your position is?

Boyles: I am the superintendent of Andersonville National Historic Site in southwest Georgia.

M: All right, and when did you work at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park and what was your job title?

B: I was a park ranger historian at Cumberland Gap from - I'm not sure, sometime in 1981 - I want to say it was early in 1981, the spring, and I left in March of 1985.

M: All right now, what I understand that at that point you worked with the interpretation division?

B: Yes, I did.

M: And could you tell me a little bit about what your job responsibilities, job duties were?

B: Yes, my responsibilities -let me see - first off, it was frontline interpretation at the visitor center, the programs that we gave, and we had a number of of conducted interpretive programs that we did, and I'll get into that in a minute. I was responsible for the operation of Hensley Settlement and cultural resource types of things and I was the - all the compliance - and I was also responsible as a collateral duty curator. Probably that's the least that I did anything with was my curatorial responsibilities.

M: All right, what I'm interested in hearing about ...what the emphasis on the cultural resource interpretation and preservation was at that time, because I know it has changed over the past 50 years. Different emphases, and I know you said you were responsible for Hensley Settlement. Can you start out with the state of Hensley Settlement was and what you did up there?

B: Well, yes, at Hensley Settlement we went through a tremendous transition, and I was initially hired by Tom Hartman who was the superintendent, and then he was only there for a very short time before Roy Sanborn came on board. Roy was very concerned about the overall cost of operation of Hensley Settlement and the general very low visitation that it received, in other words did it really pay off for so few people that went up there? The reason for that was the only way a visitor could get up there was either Brownies Creek Road because the Shillalah Creek Road was closed to the public, and very few people went up Brownies Creek Road; most went via the trail up on the Virginia side and if I had to pin it down to what group went to Hensley Settlement during early times, it was probably scouts, hiking the-I want to say Mischa Mokwa?

M: Yes.

B: Did I say that right?

M: That's right.

B: The scouts trail, so there were lots of folks that did that, but it was still just a very small number of people. When Roy Sanborn came in, he really wanted to shift the emphasis towards much more involvement and interpretation at Hensley Settlement and he had a pretty aggressive program. First off, to make it more accessible so more people could get up there, and he also wanted to generate revenue for the operation of the Hensley Settlement through the use of the -- I forget what they call it but it was the living history account, which allows you to have farm activities and then any proceeds that you make off the sale of farm commodities could be plowed back into the operation of the settlement - and this had been created and used very extensively for Capital Reef for their fruit orchards, and so we checked into that and yes, it was available to do. And so what we started to do was we got into a very large sheep operation, have you ever heard these stories?

M: No, I have not, no.

B: Yes, well before you knew it we had this enormous sheep farm going up on top of the mountain. We bought, I think it was, we bought 50 ewes and several rams, and so we had sheep breeding and we had a whole sheep operation; we had been advised by the extension service at the University of Kentucky that this would be a great place for a sheep operation. And we were going to feed out the lambs to the proper feed weight, and have them slaughtered -- well, sell them for slaughter, and so that was the plan. There was also talk of hogs and cattle, fruit orchards and all those sorts of things. It was very -- it was a big program and lots of stuff was going on.

It was also -- I remember the summer of '83 we also had a tremendous amount of funding that we called the Jobs Bill. It was in the Reagan years and it's very similar to what we're calling the stimulus package now; much, much smaller in scope but we hired like somewhere between 20 and 30 laborers, and they did all kinds of work at Hensley Settlement, rearranging the fences and other things primarily to accommodate livestock. They moved fence lines and made them more permanent so that animals could be moved from one field to another so they wouldn't graze it down too much, things like that. The farm operation was sort of a disastrous experiment, it didn't work. There was really never very much money generated, there were lots of questions whether or not this was appropriate or proper for us to be doing, and the bottom line was the regional director sent in a team that investigated it, and then directed the superintendent to no longer engage in commercial farming activities.

M: Ok, so how long did that last?

B: My guesstimate is about two years I'd say, and that's my best guess but it was a tremendous amount of resources went into that process and it was certainly exciting, it was interesting and the other thing is it was sort of an odd, there were several reasons why the sheep never made much money. One was that people in Southeastern Kentucky don't eat lamb. The process of selling stuff like agricultural commodities from the government is not very conducive to the way agriculture farmers do business -- that part didn't work either. Another thing that didn't -- prevented it from working well was that none of the lambs ever got to the full feeder weight; they need, as I recall -- I learned a lot about sheep -- and, as I recall, a lamb needs to be up to about 100 to 110 lbs to be where they should be for slaughter or meat production. And oh, by the way, a lot of people say you can make money on wool, there's no money in wool, there's just not much there.

M: When you were here, is that when the tours began? Were they doing the tours up to Hensley?

B: No, no, no. I'll get to interpretation in a minute.

M: Ok.

B: The other thing that got us on the lamb production was, we had, in my mind I remember, three separate dog attacks that killed, you know, 10-15 lambs at a pop and it was just pretty devastating. And then we had to change the way we took care of the sheep to protect them, well, then they were -- that created all kinds of other problems. Now the tours, no, they did not -- I've heard a lot about those -- they did not start while I was there.

M: Did you have people living up at the settlement then, volunteers to take care of the sheep?

B: Yes, that was one of the things that we wanted to have, because one of the first things the superintendent wanted me to do was to do was to get somebody living up there. And so we hired a seasonal person, by the way he's still around, he works at the Smokies the last I heard, and his name is Pat Patton.

M: Oh, yes.

B: You know Pat?

M: I've met him, yes.

B: He'd be a good person to interview as well.

M: Ok.

B: He was the first person. We then thought about, what would -- how about having someone live there as a volunteer? And so, I forgot whose idea it was, since it was a good idea I'll claim credit for it, but it actually was sort of an interesting idea. But we had drafted a letter for the superintendent and it was sent as a letter to the editor to "Mother Earth News," and said we have an opportunity for someone to live in Hensley Settlement. We described it, and in return we provide a place to live and the requirement is you have to have your own income either by retirement or annuity or something, so in other words we're not paying you, and you have to have a four-wheel drive vehicle to be able to get up and down. And we ended up, I remember, we actually got hundreds of resumes in for this, and the screen out element was the thing about having an income, and that eliminated probably 80 or 90 percent of the people who wanted to do that. And we had a panel and everything, and we screened it and we came up with the top candidates, there were like three or four candidates, we brought them in and interviewed them and then selected a couple, they were an older couple, and I can't remember their names, through that process and they lived up there for quite a while. They actually left, or I left before they had been on for a while and then that evidently was somewhat successful, I believe.

M: Ok, so visitors to visit Hensley Settlement during that time would just get up there by their own speed?

B: Yes, through the Jobs Bill and some other project funding, there were significant improvements made to the Brownies Creek Road and the Shillalah Creek Road to make it easier for vehicles to get up there, and even though we always said it was a four-wheel drive road, we kind of winked at people and said if you got a good pickup truck and it's not bad weather, you shouldn't have any problem getting up there. Only in rare conditions did I ever use four-wheel drive to get up there myself, so it had to be bad weather or something.

M: Ok.

B: That increased traffic up there. The other thing we did was we did two events, special events, that brought a lot of people up either driving up the road or hiking in, and we even got a TV show to come and cover the most popular one of all. In the fall, we did syrup making and that was sort of a partnership with a church, and that was real popular. It was a lot of fun and it was like an all weekend -- and I want to say it was like a three-day weekend that we did that. But in the spring, and it was usually Memorial Day weekend, we made moonshine.

M: Oh I've seen photos of that, yes.

B: Yes, and that was the most fun, oh we had a good time with that. I was in charge of that and of course ... I knew nothing about making moonshine, I learned a lot, but we had a volunteer who did it. We had a permit from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and by the way, one year they actually came up and checked us out, so that was sort of exciting too. And those were the draws, the syrup and the moonshine, those were the big draws, but we had all other things going on too. We were plowing or using horse drawn equipment -- all those other things were going on for people to see. There were stations, we had a person at the schoolhouse doing, you know, being the teacher and all those kinds of things. So, and oh, we sheared sheep at one of them, I forget which one it was and let people try their hand at that. So, there were just lots of activities, and those weekends would just bring in hundreds and hundreds of people and they came from all different ways and all, and it was just a lot of fun.

M: So, during the rest of the year there would be people living up there, or seasonally, speaking and so they would be doing things if visitors just happened to come up?

B: Yes, yes and now during that time we had two permanent employees, I remember Chester Thomas who was sort of the Hensley guru and there was another guy named Doug, I can't remember his last name. They were both really smart, excellent employees, very dedicated and their title was Farmer Demonstrator and they did all kinds of traditional maintenance work around the settlement, you know, fixing broken things, and they knew every inch of the settlement. They also did farming activities that needed to be done, but they were always available to do a tour.

M: Ok.

B: Yes, and they would take people around and open buildings up and tell them about Willie Gibbons and Sherman Hensley, and all those people and their stories. The big issue with them from a personnel standpoint was their duty station because, when I got there, their duty station was Hensley Settlement. Now, like my duty station right now is Andersonville National Historic Site, so my day starts when I get up in the morning and I drive to work, but I have to be at work by the start of my day. Well, getting to Hensley Settlement was no small task and these guys had to maintain a four-wheel drive vehicle. Now, most of the year it was pretty easy to get there, but during those really difficult times they had to have, you know when it was raining and snowing and all that, they had to get up there, they had to be there by 7:30 in the morning. I remember Chester, a lot of times, it actually took him less time to walk up the mountain, that trail from, what's that little community in Virginia?

M: Ewing.

B: Ewing. He would ride over to Ewing and walk up the trail and he could get there quicker than by driving all the way around.

M: I can believe that.

B: But, you know, that's a tough trail because it's straight up.

M: I'd like to hear more about what other interpretation you were involved in.

B: When I got there, we didn't do a lot of personal interpretation because we had so few people, and I went to the chief, Wes Leishman -- I don't know where Wes is these days, I'm sure he's retired -- but I went to Wes and said I'd really like to see if we can get -- because we didn't have money for many seasonals, we maybe hired three or four -- but I said I'd like to get a lot more stuff going on and a lot more interpretation going on, can I go get some college interns? And he said yes, and what the deal was is we had some of the old Job Corps facilities, and we worked on them and ...we had a trailer that was dedicated to housing interns. Actually we had two trailers and we could put females in one and males in another, and there was like three bedrooms and a bath that they would share.

And so we had interns from all over the place, in fact I am looking at a picture now of one of the best groups we had -- four interns, college interns and they would come for the summer. And we were able to have programs in the campground six nights a week, campfire programs; we had a daily program called "along the wilderness trail" that we went from the visitors center back in the woods, and we talked about the migration of the folks through the Cumberland Gap and where they came from, where they were going and their motivations and all that. That was a 30-minute program. Also associated with that was long rifle firing demonstrations at the visitors center. We had a Civil War program that went every day of the week up at the forts up on the Pinnacle road. We always had someone, seven days a week, at the Pinnacle overlook to be available because, I'm assuming it's all still there, that got more visitors than anywhere else and if you were in uniform and you stood there, you were just inundated with questions.

M: Yes.

B: We had, I mentioned the Civil War program, and then we also, to help our farmer demonstrators, we would have one of our folks doing tours at Hensley one day a week and we covered that all seven days a week and I think that's it, yes. So, we had a very, I would call a robust and personal services interpretive program.

M: Yes, indeed.

B: The one thing I wished we had covered and never did was the kind of the Iron Furnace area down there.

M: That's still, I think, not covered enough. That's some place I'd like to see more interpretation, we built a new parking lot and it's easier to get to but

B: Well, one thing we did do there was -- I was, I've always been real interested in that; in iron making and process interpretation which is kind of like a recipe, how do you make something that we don't know much about. And we did a brochure on the Furnace and how it operated and . . . that was made available to the public over there. And I got a lot of help from a fellow named Harry Hoe.

M: Oh yes, I've interviewed him.

B: Yes, and Harry, this was before Bo had come back, and I knew Harry through Kiwanis, I was in Kiwanis with Harry and he's the one that kind of taught me about iron-making. That's what his company did and he funded the printing of the brochure for the iron furnace.

M: Oh.

B: Yeah, that was sort of a neat thing.

M: I've talked to him simply about his role in the dedication; he was chair of the dedication committee, but I had not talked to him-.

B: Yeah and when Richard Nixon came-

M: Yes, yes.

B: He was the state representative then, I think.

M: I don't know if he was in the legislature but he was, as you know, a decorated war hero and big man on campus, so... now, in the 80's were you at all involved in any of the talks when they were planning the tunnel, the building of the tunnel, and the restoration of the Gap road? Was that a topic at that time?

B: Biggest thing I got involved with was, I remember that the tunnel got rolling because of -- I guess it was how Rogers got elected, got elected right about the time I got there, and boy, he got behind that thing. Mitch McConnell got elected but he didn't have any real power, he was pretty junior at that time. But, Wendell Ford also was big on pushing for funding for the tunnel as I recall. Anyway, but it did get going and we started getting involved with the Department of Transportation and I had very little

involvement with that, because it was really just getting started really the time I left. But what I did get involved with ... I remember going to Ed Bearss, you know who Ed is?

M: Yes.

B: And saying that we really needed a study to determine, so where was the Wilderness Road? We had some ideas about it and there had been some writing done about it, but to really say that here's where the Wilderness Road was -- we didn't know. And if the goal was to restore the Gap and the historic scene -- we got to know that stuff and we need to do the background research. And so, Ed was helpful in getting the money put in, and then the study started and a fellow, a historian, at Denver Service Center named Jerry Krackow, made several initial visits and I spent time with him, a lot of time with him ... pouring over aerial photographs and historic documents and then walking. Oh gosh, we climbed all over everywhere looking for historic roads and cuts, and ... where you could see where people had traveled in the past. And then I left, but his study got finished, you've seen that study, I'm sure.

M: Yes, I have one right here, it's really amazing.

B: I have one too. My successor really worked heavily with him when that was all done.

M: What's the name of your successor?

B: Dan Brown.

M: Brown, Ok. Well...I don't know if you've been back here since the road's been restored-

B: No, I never have.

M: It's incredible, you can't tell there was a highway... and the amount of work that went into that. We had just moved here and they had just finished the tunnel, and they were working on the restoration, the amount of dirt moved and contours and trees planted, and it really- . In 20 years you're not going to be able to tell there was ever a highway anywhere near here. So, quite an accomplishment.

You've told me a lot about Hensley, would you say that was probably the biggest improvement or change that you saw while you were here?

B: I would definitely call it a change -- looking back on it currently as a superintendent, I mean it was not a very good period and it was definitely not what the National Park Service should have been doing there. I remember one of the things that was really neat for me was Lloyd Abelson, have you heard that name?

M: I have, yes I have.

B: Lloyd Abelson at the time was the superintendent of Andrew Johnson [National Historic Site], and so I went over and visited with him for a day because he really was the person who led the effort to restore Hensley Settlement. So I went and talked to him about a lot of things, you know, and that was a real eye-opener to me to learn his background and all that. He's deceased now, but he was just a wealth of information about why we did what we did, and so on. But yes, Hensley Settlement was a big part of that, the other things that I was very much involved with was the production of a film, I spent more time on that than maybe any one single project. It was a short film that was our introductory movie and I even still have the file, I brought it today, of all my information on that and -- not that there's too much to it but it was a contract through Harpers Ferry film division with a production company called Audio Visual Specialties, and they produced the movie. And I was the location coordinator, I think that was the title I had, and so I made all the arrangements for volunteers and living history costumes -- you name it -- we had to come up with Indians for an Indian attack. They don't still show the film, do they?

M: We have new films created just a few years ago.

B: Ah, ok. Well, I'm sure these would have been way out of date. At the time we had a slideshow, when I got there we had a slideshow and the chief of interpretation had written up a proposal to make a movie and so the movie was filmed all at the park, and Lorne Greene -- do you remember Lorne Greene?

M: You mean Lorne Greene the actor? Yes.

B: Yes, he was the narrator of the film and they used that song, "I am the Cumberland Gap," that was the music behind it. All together I think we had... oh there were 86 volunteers in this thing, Civil War, we used a lot of the guys through the Overmountain Victory Trail because they had all the proper attire. And just bunches of different folks -- we had to go to Cherokee to get the Indians for the Indian attack. We needed cold weather, we actually filmed some of it in the snow to get the cold weather. And, you know, there were times we had to feed everybody, and how do you go about doing all that? But it was a blast, I really enjoyed doing that. It was one of the most fun things, and there was just a tremendous amount of effort that went into helping it all come together.

M: Is that something that was shown on a regular basis?

B: Oh yes, I guess every 30 minutes or so it was shown at the visitors center for probably 20 years, is my guess.

M: Yes, well, I know after the road was restored, they came and created new films showing more action along the Wilderness Road, but I'm sure we have a copy of that, I'd like to find it.

B: Yes, and the big thing was, who was going to be Daniel Boone? And we actually used one of our rangers, Charlie Chadwell.

M: Yes, I know Charlie.

B: Ok, well, he was Daniel Boone, there's just good, good stuff of him, you know, looking like Daniel Boone, and I mean there's no person that I knew of that knew more about the woods and tracking, and he was just it and he fit.

M: Well, he's on my list to interview next week, so I'll have to ask him about that.

B: Ask him about when he was Daniel Boone.

M: Well, Mr. Boyles, can you think of anything else that stands out in your mind of your time here?

B: Well, I remember one big project that we worked on was the restoration of Fort McCook.

M: Oh?

B: That was a big deal and what it was, is there were all those earthworks that were all over the mountain and I remember a seasonal, Richard Beeler. . .

M: Oh yes, I know him.

B: Ok, Richard came to me and he said, "We are losing Fort McCook," and I said "No, no, no, no, you know everything looks fine up there," and he said, "No, look at these pictures," and he showed me pictures from like 10 years ago that he had taken and then pictures from the current time, and it was like, "Oh my god, you're right, it's just washing away." And someone had planted vinca minor all over the earthworks and it had done a fabulous job of holding the soil. Now, you may say that vinca minor is a...

M: Invasive, exotic?

B: An exotic and all that, but it sure did the job. Well, for some reason it either hadn't taken or it ... didn't work at Fort McCook, and so we essentially we did all the proper compliance and we hauled in huge amounts of soil and brought it back up to where it was, and I remember one of the things that sort of stands out in my mind, it was sort of an interesting part of it, they said, "We want to make sure that we separate the old material from the new material." In other words, the old dirt- the Civil War dirt --from

the new dirt we're going to add, because we don't want someone to think ... we're not trying to mask what we've done. And I said, "Well, why don't I just go to the bank and get a roll of brand new pennies and they'll all say- I want to say '83- we'll just throw them all out in the dirt, and then we'll cover it over with the new dirt?" and they said, "Well, that would work," but that's when SEAC [Southeastern Archeological Center] came up with these plastic plugs and we used those and they had the date on them. So ...there's all these plastic plugs because I remember we went around, we had to sort of take a little hammer and tap them into the dirt, and they say NPS and then the date, and they're all in there in Fort McCook, so if you ever dig in Fort McCook -- say you go through a foot of soil, and then you would see one of these plugs, you would know that it's the original material.

M: Well, that's very interesting; we are just getting ready to go up there. Both those cannons are due for a rehab just this year, and that's something we're preparing for -- the carriages and the cannons and the earthworks -- because once again, especially McCook, is very much eroded, and people tromping on it. I guess it was 1983 when you last did that, because we're about to do it again.

B: Yes, and we did plant, we put the soil in, but we also planted the periwinkle to help hold the soil. And I think the thing with McCook is the way it sits is part of the reason it erodes more, and people are all over it. So, the other thing we considered was why don't we just close that off to the public for a year or two? But we believed at that time it was too far gone, that that wouldn't work; that wasn't a viable treatment.

M: Well, what we're thinking about now is perhaps an elevated boardwalk because, as you remember, you have a wonderful lookout right there and so that's what people are getting to, and if we had a little raised boardwalk instead, if you're going to walk, walk on this; so we might end up putting that in. Well, that's very interesting, I'm glad to know. I'll look for those plugs because we're going to put, I think, some more dirt on there and we might need to get another row of those plugs from SEAC to put 2009 on there.

B: Yes, another thing, we did a lot of partnering, and I think more than anything else I enjoyed that more than anything, and that was, we got all the service clubs to sponsor -- we call them the youth apprentice program and high school kids. We did this, I remember, three years running, and we paid these high school kids a whopping salary of-- I want to say \$400-\$500 for the summer -- and we made them into volunteers. There were four kids a summer, and each one was sponsored by a civic club like the Rotary; and we had an apprentice historian who worked directly with me, we had an apprentice biologist who worked with the natural resource person, we had an apprentice carpenter and an apprentice mechanic and they each worked with... they became helpers to Bob Hapten who was like the carpenter,

he was all over the park; he was the “fix-it” guy that went around and, you know, did plumbing and carpentry, just all kinds of stuff, and so he became the helper to that person. And then we had a full-time mechanic who was always working on equipment and trucks and everything. So those were the proverbial guys ... who the boys from the high school would love to do the hands-on kind of stuff.

M: It sounds like a great idea.

B: Oh, it was fun and we had great kids, and they loved their work and the civic clubs liked it, we would have them go and pictures in the paper and all kinds of stuff. Another thing was we did was, we had a -- I really enjoyed -- there was a photo club, and this was a partnership with Pine Mountain.

M: Yes, Pine Mountain State Park?

B: Right, Pine Mountain State Park and us and this photo club, and we had a photo contest and you would come to the park and there was prizes and all this.... It was nature photography and landscape photography, and then in our visitors center we had that great big open area. And we got a local photographer and he took all the old historic photographs that we had in our collection from the establishment of Middlesboro period, I can't remember the -- what we called it -- who the main guy was ?

M: Oh, Alexander Arthur?

B: Alexander Arthur, yes, how could I forget? All those wonderful pictures from the 1880's and 90's and they were blown up in a huge format and then we had an exhibition, and I want to say we had 60 or 70 of those displays, and so whether you were interested in the historic photographs, or nature photographs, this all came together at a big weekend. It was a big event. Another fun thing we did, that I really enjoyed, was we had a big Civil War weekend on July the 4th, we had lots of programs going and we would fire the cannon.

M: I've heard people have asked us to do that again, so I've heard about that.

B: Oh, we had a good time with that and I went to black powder school. Years before I got there, they did the long rifle demonstration and it was so popular, and so we went back to doing that. But I had to go to black powder school so I went ahead and also got certified in Civil War small arms and Civil War cannon, so we shot the cannon and I remember a July 4th that we broke all visitation records for one single day and it was just really, really good. We also had a big Civil War reenactment at the park. Those are not good memories, that wasn't a good one -- things didn't go all that well for that, but anyway we had a lot of folks for that too.

M: We're doing one in October, planning a Civil War event.

B: Oh.

M: Well, it sounds like with such a small staff you certainly got around, got a lot done and worked with other groups, which is something that we should get back to trying to do, I think.

B: Well, it was just fun, you know, we had a good time it was a great staff and- you know Lee Wilder?

M: No, no, don't know that name.

B: Ok, she-- I believe she is at San Antonio Missions [National Historical Park], but you might be able to find her, and she was there during my time and she still works for the park service, I think.

M: Ok, all right. Well, this is terrific; I appreciate you filling in a lot of gaps for me and this helps tell the story from that time, so I appreciate your time and I hope you don't mind if I think of other questions if I get back to you?

B: Not at all, please feel free to do so and again there's just wonderful memories of that place and the people we interacted with and we did good stuff .

M: You did, especially a lot with Hensley and I would love if you ever are up in this area to come and see the road and the tunnel. It really has changed the landscape completely from what you remember.

B: I would love to do that.

M: Since you were so instrumental in relocating the Wilderness Road it would be neat to show you.

B: You bet.

M: Alright, well, thank you very much and I'll send you a transcript of this.

B: Thank you, I do appreciate that.

THIS INTERVIEW HAS BEEN EDITED FOR CLARITY AND EASE OF READING. THE ORIGINAL IS ON FILE AT THE PARK.